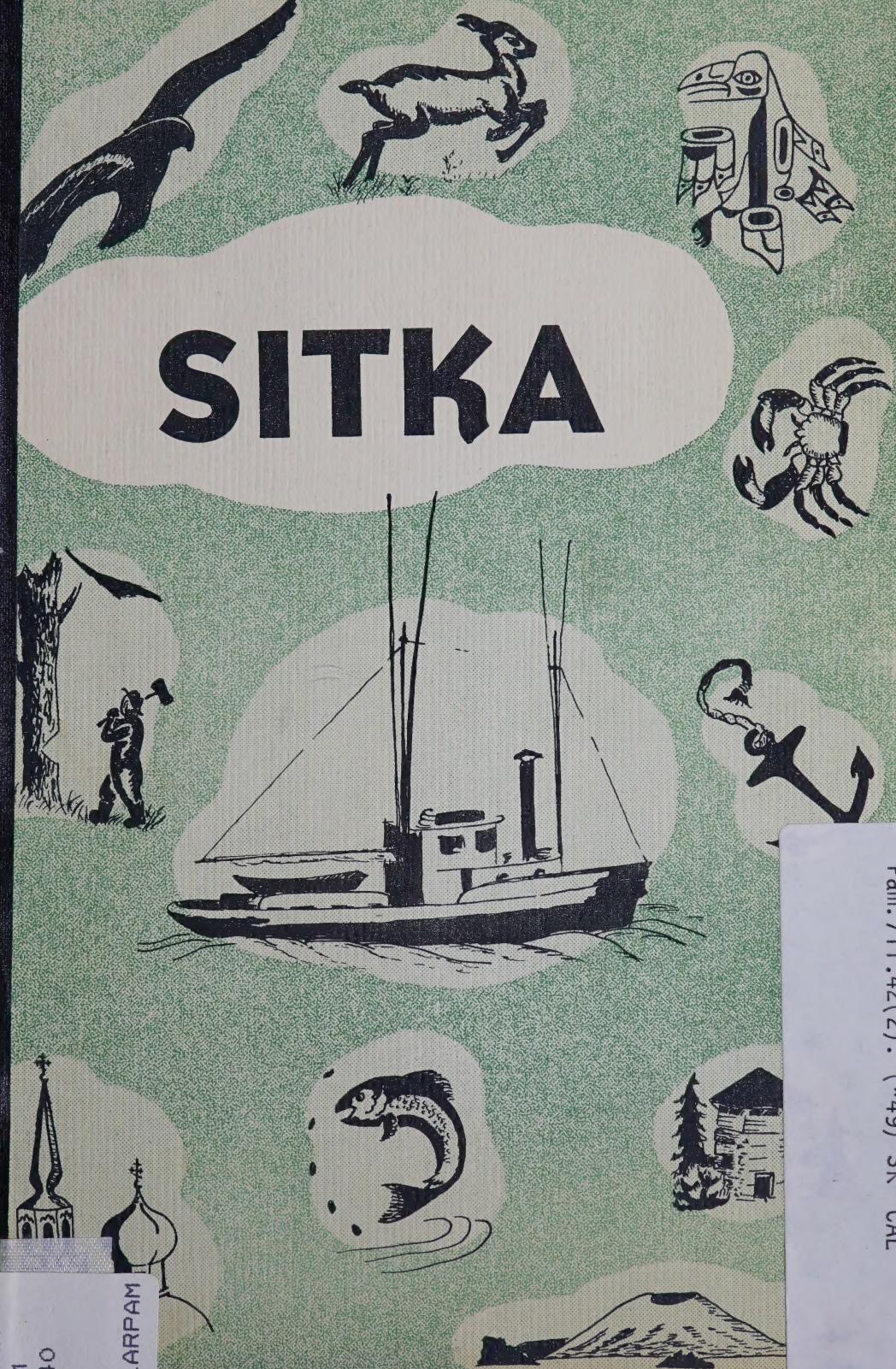


SITKA



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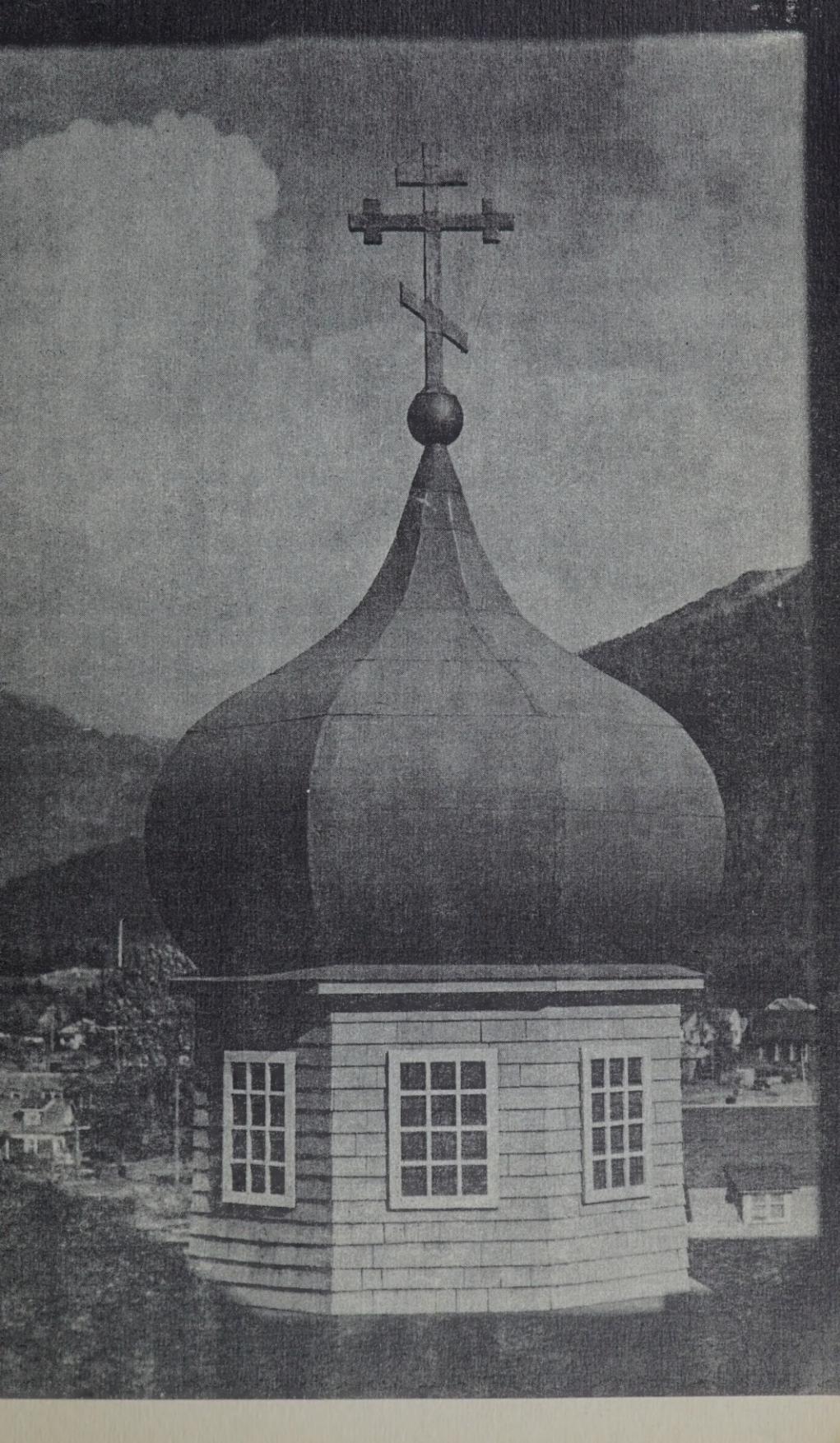
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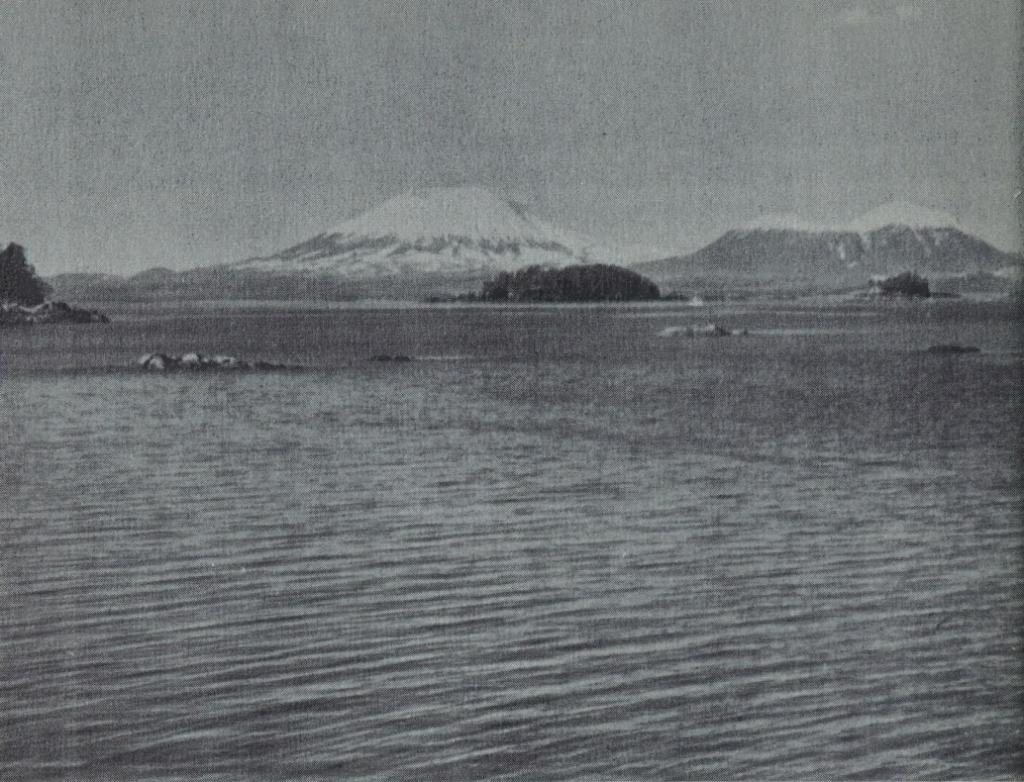
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EXPLORATION — To the men that sailed for Good Queen Bess, America was an obstacle to navigation. Hoping to discover a navigable waterway through the continent, English seamen nosed into every bay and river on the eastern shore, but repeated disappointments seemed not to dim their conviction that a passage actually existed. It was on their charts and it was called the Northwest Passage. It was extremely important because it would take them to the rich Orient in comparative safety.

The better part of two centuries had slipped into history, with the search yet unsuccessful, when someone thought of a new approach. Since the eastern end of the passage could not be located, why not find the western end first. It would then be easy to sail from west to east through the passage, emerge in the familiar Atlantic and thus find the long-sought Atlantic entrance. This idea was one of the specific reasons for the famous third voyage of Captain James Cook, who reached the northwest coast of America in 1778. Though his daring and painstaking search revealed no passage, Cook did discover some facts that were of great importance to the Western world.

A major fact, and a painful surprise, was that the English were late. Thirty-seven years earlier Bering and Chirikoff, seeking geographical knowledge for Peter the Great, had touched two points on the coast, and since then other motives had caused a considerable migration to the new land. Cook found the Russians established in permanent settlements as far east as Cook Inlet. The Spaniards had been well up the coast three years before, making a gesture of



... a conspicuous landmark for sailors ...

justification for their claim that the entire coast belonged to Spain. They called a conspicuous landmark on the outer coast San Jacinto. Cook ignored both the Spanish name and the Russian name, St. Lazaria, and called it Mt. Edgecumbe, the name of a low mountain at the entrance to Plymouth Harbor in England.

THE SEA OTTER — Cook himself never learned the most important fact about the Northwest Coast, for he died in the Hawaiian Islands on the return passage, but his men learned it when the ships reached China. With the casual acquisitiveness of all seamen, they had picked up a few dozen strange, vermin-infested furs which now brought them Chinese silver in astounding sums. They nearly mutinied when they were denied the privilege of turning the King's ships into traders and going back after more of the skins. Their fantastic tale of the easy riches that they could have

had reached the ears of a few shrewd merchants and trader-skippers, and by the time Vancouver reached the coast in 1793, fifteen years after Cook, the painted savages had mirrors, cloth, guns and whisky. The sturdy little vessels of the Boston Men and the King George Men had been cruising for years among the myriad islands of the Alexander Archipelago.

Meanwhile, La Perouse also had visited the coast and claimed for France this vast region which was already claimed by Russia, Spain and Britain. The Northwest Coast was rapidly becoming a focal point of imperialistic attentions, and three of the interested powers blandly ignored the fact that Russia was already in actual possession.

Wherever he went, Vancouver heard tales of a Russian named Baranoff, and he tried repeatedly to arrange a meeting, but without success. No one can say that a meeting between these two would have changed the history of the North Pacific in any respect, yet it seems a pity that the great Russian merchant and the great English explorer should have missed each other by scarcely more than an hour's sailing.

FUR HUNTERS — Long before Cook, the Siberian fur hunters had pushed eastward to the Pacific. Behind them were the tax collectors and the Cossacks, so not even the Pacific could stop them. Ignorant of shipbuilding, they constructed flimsy, thong-fastened craft which often disintegrated in the first blow. Ignorant of seamanship and navigation, they spread hide sails to the winds of the unknown ocean. Sometimes the survivors brought back the ship they had taken out, usually named Saints Peter and Paul, though more often they returned in a small boat built from the wreck of the Peter and Paul or in an open skin boat. But if they came back at all they brought bundles of skins of bobri morski, the sea otter, for trade across the

Chinese border. A tiny craft could carry a fortune.

From island to island the hunters worked their way along the thousand-mile-long Aleutian chain toward the American continent, but presently they ceased to be hunters. Providentially, the islands were peopled with hunters who were far more skilled than the Russians. They were Aleuts and Kodiaks, Eskimoid peoples who used that marvelous craft, the kayak which the Russians called bidarka, meaning little skin canoe. When a sea otter was sighted, dozing or swim-

... six thousand miles in quest of the sea otter ...



ming on the surface, the cruising fleet of fifty to a hundred canoes formed a circle around it, frightened it into diving and tightened the circle. When it emerged the yells of the hunters and the slap of their paddles on the water drove it down again before it could take in a gasping breath. The circle was tightened until a spear or the arrow from a throwing stick ended the creature's life.

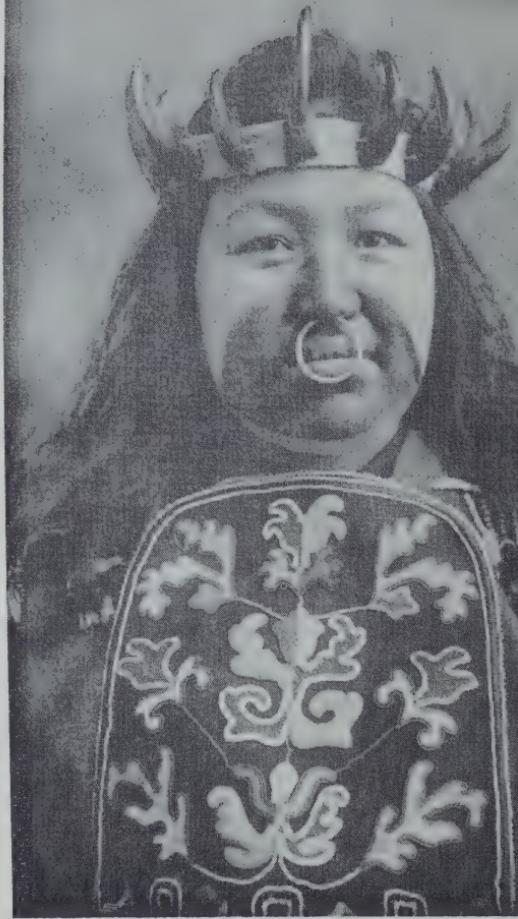
Without the Aleut and his bidarka there would have been no Sitka, no Fort Ross in California and no Russian-American treaty of 1867. The Russians were

quick to appreciate his virtues, so they gave him a crushing lesson in submission, then sent him out to hunt. This pleasant arrangement made it possible for the Russians to set themselves up as independent fur traders, and large numbers of them did so. Gradually, however, the rugged individualists were crowded out by organized companies, so that by the time Cook appeared on the scene the independent Russian traders had given way to half a dozen quarreling companies which had built settlements on the islands and on the mainland at Cook Inlet.

And the pretty little sea otter was well on the road to extinction.

BARANOFF — At the Kodiak Island headquarters of one of the fur companies there arrived, in 1791, a new manager: stumpy, crabby, kindly Alexander Andreevich Baranoff (pronounced Bah-rahn off), a man who had both a vision and a knack for driving, cajoling or bluffing men to do his bidding. Within a decade there was only one company left in the field, the Russian-American Company, and he was its Chief Manager.

Baranoff's vision was of a sub-empire for Mother Russia, sweeping eastward and southeastward from Kamchatka clear down to the Spanish ports in Calif-



Tlinget woman in ceremonial costume



Tlingit chief in ceremonial costume

was a sympathetic master, and they learned to call him Little Father and, sometimes, Nanook the bear. He shared their hardships and joined in their pleasures and he took one of their women to wife, somewhat informally, since he already had a wife in Russia. His two American children, Irena and Antipater, died in their teens.

Baranoff had known before he ever saw Kodiak that he must move his capital to a more commanding position. Accordingly, even while he was fighting and bluffing the other companies out of existence he was sending his bidarka fleets on long voyages down the coast. They brought back furs in abundance, and they

ornia; then, with a sphere of influence, westward to the Hawaiian Islands, on to Japan and thence back to Siberia. A fantastic vision, perhaps, but in the face of immense odds, despite a perpetual shortage of men, ships and supplies, despite the constant heckling of the aristocratic officers of the Russian navy, he lived to see his dream very nearly fulfilled.

One of his first moves was to lay down rigid hunting regulations: certain areas would be closed each year; there would be no further slaughter of females and young. To the much-abused Aleuts he

told of an extinct volcano that loomed on the outer coast, and of a quiet, island-dotted bay behind the mountain. An English trader named the bay Norfolk Sound, but the Russians borrowed a name from the inhabitants of the region and called it Sitka Sound. Visiting the place in person, the Chief Manager verified his impression that it was the ideal spot for his capital.

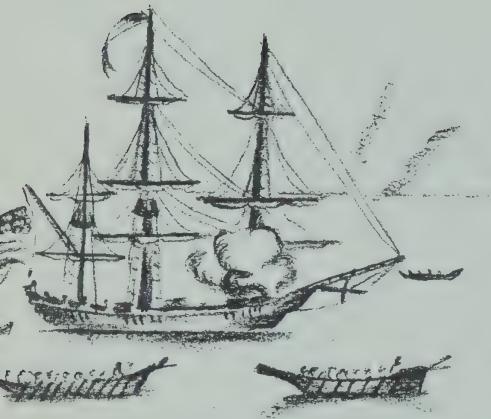
But fight and scheme as he would, it was eight years before Baranoff could muster the necessary ships and men, and when the long awaited day came it was a picturesque rather than an effective fleet that set out to turn a new page in the history of the Northwest Coast.

Baranoff's fleet entered Sitka Sound on the 25th of May, 1799. He himself commanded the cutter Olga, the size of a modern trolling boat. The other vessel was the scarcely larger sloop Konstantin. Together they carried twenty-two Russians. The rest of the expedition consisted of three hundred bidarki paddled by six hundred Aleuts. There had been more at the start, but a storm had swallowed thirty of the skin canoes, men and all. Then, to spare his tired paddlers the ordeal of a second gale, Baranoff had climbed into a bidarka and led the fleet ashore, only to

Alexander Baranoff



lose thirteen more crews when the Indians made a night attack on the exhausted camp.



... trouble for the Russians.

Fort Archangel Gabriel, and the men sang an ode that Baranoff had written for the occasion.

While the Russians thus prepared to earn future profits in furs, the present profits went to others. At least eight trading vessels, American and British, were in the waters of Southeast Alaska that summer, and several of them were around Sitka. They were buying sea otter skins by the thousand, paying for them with cloth, knives, Chinese chests, beads and, quite commonly, with guns, powder, lead and whisky. The foreigners could trade and run, but the Russians had to stay and face the inevitable trouble.

By the summer of 1800 things were going fairly well at the new settlement. Not so with the rest of the far

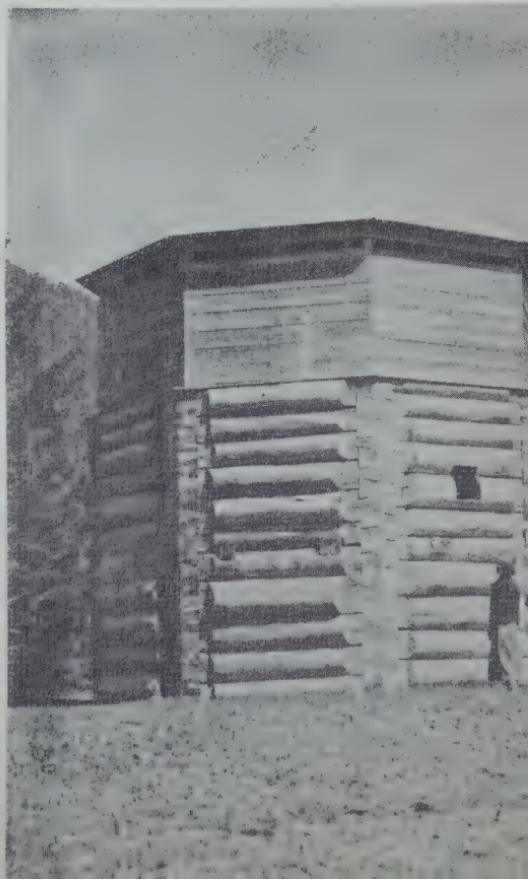
OLD SITKA — The best townsite on the Sound, where Sitka stands today, was occupied by a native village, so Baranoff reluctantly passed it by. In a small bay six miles to the northward he landed, bought ground from Chief Katlean, and laid out his town. Axes rang, trees crashed, and strong log buildings began to rise: warehouse, cattle sheds, blacksmith shop, fort, barracks, bathhouse. At the dedication ceremony the town was christened

flung colony. Indian attacks, quarrels and the insubordination of the naval officers commanding the company ships had the westward posts in a turmoil. One of the officers, resentful at having to take orders from a man of the despised merchant class—though he had taken the job voluntarily and at double pay—sailed out of Sitka Sound in a huff, against orders, and lost his ship, a cargo of furs and several men.

Believing that the new town could now look after itself, Baranoff made a tour of the other posts, quelling mutinies, soothing ruffled feelings and setting the stalled machinery of trade in motion again. He was needed everywhere at once, for he had no assistants who were both trustworthy and competent. And to add to his worries the ship Phoenix was overdue from Siberia with badly needed supplies. When news of the Phoenix did arrive it came in the shape of wreckage drifting ashore.

For a year and a half business and trouble kept the Chief Manager at Kodiak. Meanwhile at Old Sitka the Indians prepared a blow that set the colony back for years. Abandoning their inter-tribal wars for a time, the Sitkas and their neighbors, the Chilkats, the Kakes, the Hoonahs, the Kootznahoos and the Stikines, assembled on the quiet. When the time was ripe there burst from the forest hundreds of howl-

... a replica of the old ...



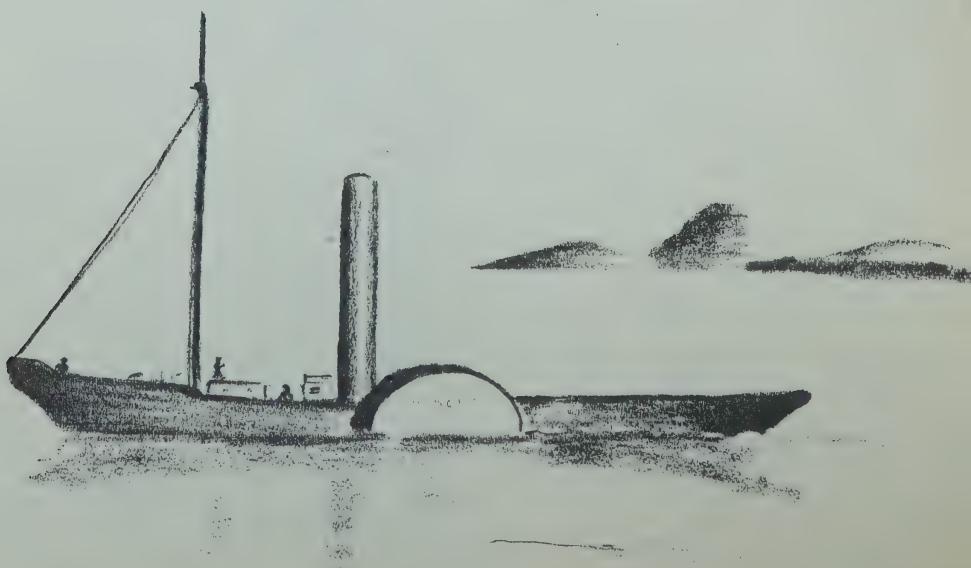
ing warriors, wearing masks that were well calculated to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. Other hordes swept around the headland in huge war canoes.

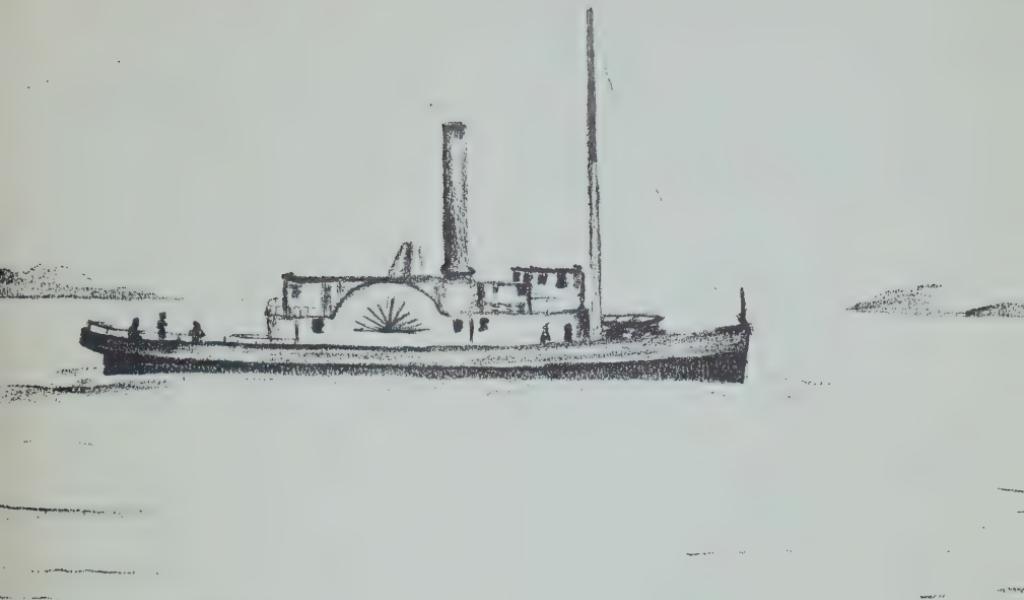
The attack caught the town totally unprepared, and the inhabitants fled to the second story of the barracks while the attackers swarmed over the stockade. It was too late for an effective defense, and those who jumped to escape the flames that soon roared through the building died on the spears below. A mere handful escaped into the woods, later got passage to Kodiak in an English ship, and saddened the Little Father with their story.

RECAPTURE — The fleet that assembled in Sitka Sound in the fall of 1804 was relatively powerful. Captain Lisianski's armed ship Neva was there, on her way around the world. From Kodiak came a hundred and twenty Russians in two small ships, convoying three hundred bidarki manned by eight hundred Aleuts and Kodiaks. Delayed by trouble at his other posts, Baranoff arrived last, with two more small vessels.

With a hundred bidarki towing the Neva, the fleet

... launched the sixty-horsepower Nicolai I ...





... the gunboat Politkofski ...

17

moved to a position fronting the present site of Sitka. Baranoff landed, took possession of a jutting rock now known as Castle Hill, and fortified it. From their log fort near Indian River the Indians, impressed by the Russian show of force, sent an envoy to talk peace. They could have peace, Baranoff told them, if they would grant the Russians permanent possession of the site and hand over hostages as a guarantee of good behavior. The terms were rejected.

Finding in the ensuing bombardment of the fort that neither solid shot nor grape did much damage, the Russians sent a party to destroy the canoes on the beach, while Baranoff, growing impatient, led an unsuccessful assault which cost him ten men. Next day, nursing a wounded arm, he asked Lisianski to take charge of the attack. This was a job for a trained military man.

Lisianski opened fire again from closer range, and the defenders sued for peace. After three days of negotiations the Indians agreed to surrender. Their



bravery is unquestioned, and Lisienski himself believed that if their ammunition had held out they would have fought to a finish. A supply of powder had arrived by dugout canoe, but a well-placed shot from the ships had blown it out of the water.

In the end, however, the Indians did not surrender. Themselves masters of the double cross, they no doubt expected it.

Furthermore, they had found out by observing the Aleuts what fate awaited a proud people who made truce with the Russians. Slipping out of the fort in the night, therefore, they took to the woods, leaving

... in the National Monument.

behind them two old women, the bodies of thirty warriors, and the bodies of five children slain lest their cries betray the stealthy flight.

NEW SITKA — From the first, the New Archangel, or Sitka, that rose on the ashes of the native village possessed greater vitality than the old town. The site was much better, the harbor more sheltered. More workmen were available and supplies were relatively abundant. Not that life was easy. Small parties that left the protection of the stockade did not always return, for little bands of Indians still lurked in the woods. Supply ships came all too rarely, and as the Russians continued to be miserable sailors and navigators shipwreck was commonplace. The worst dis-

aster was the loss of the Neva, which went to pieces near Cape Edgecumbe. Down with her went thirty-eight people, a year's supplies and many valuable church accouterments of gold and silver. It was the latter that gave rise to a persistent yarn that the Neva was a treasure ship.

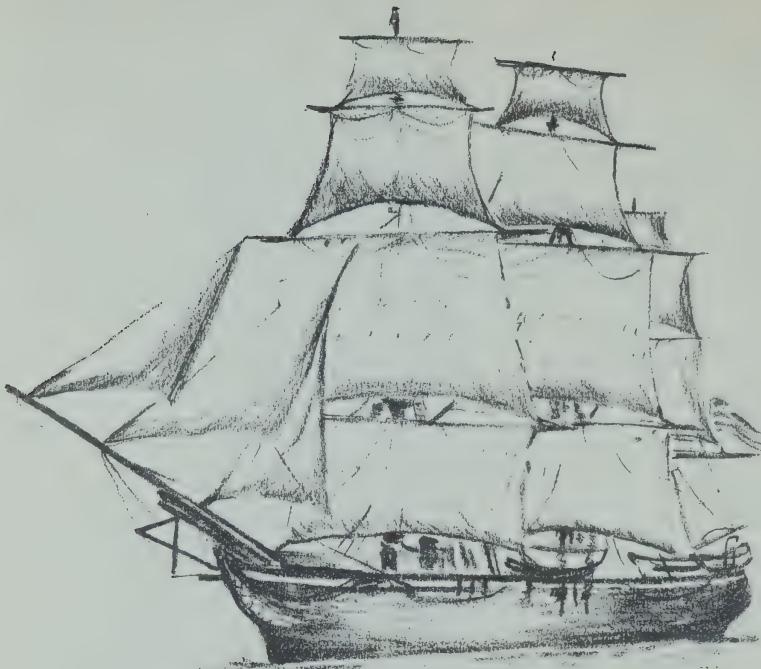
During the first year New Sitka received a visitor of great importance: Rezanoff, special emissary of the emperor. "We all live poorly," he reported, "but worse than all lives the founder of this place, in a miserable hut that leaks like a sieve. Wonderful man! He cares only for the comfort of others, and is very neglectful of himself. Once I found his bed floating in the water, and asked him whether the wind had torn a board from the side of the hut.

"'No,' he answered quietly, 'it is only the old leak,' and turned again to his occupation. I tell you, gentlemen, that Baranoff is an original. . . . His name is heard on the whole western coast, down to California. The Bostonians esteem him and respect him, and the savage tribes, in their dread of him, offer their friendship from the most distant regions."

Labor troubles were incessant. Once Baranoff's faithful Aleuts ambushed his would-be assassins. Another time a bunch of cutthroats planned to kill him, plunder the arsenel,

Our Lady of Kazan





U.S. sloop-of-war Jamestown . . . to cure yellow fever.

capture a ship and with more than enough Indian maids to go around sail away for a merry life in the South Seas. Seeing that the colony was in great need of tractable labor, Rezanoff suggested conducting naval raids on Japanese coast towns to blackbird craftsmen. Baranoff agreed to the plan and an island close to town was chosen as a home for the new workers and named Japanese Island. But no Japs came to live on Japonski; the raids were a failure.

Another of Rezanoff's ideas proved more practicable. Impelled by the acute food shortage, which was intensified by the presence of his large party, he bought the American ship Juno, with a cargo of food-stuffs. Then he sailed the Juno down to Monterey to arrange a trade agreement with the Spaniards. While there, incidentally, he found time to fall in love with the daughter of the Spanish governor, thereby endow-

ing lush and romantic California with its lushest historical romance.

By 1810, when Golovin called at Sitka in the Russian sloop-of-war Diana, living conditions were much better. He wrote: "In Baranoff's house the furniture and finishing were of fine workmanship and costly, having been brought from St. Petersburg and England; but what astonished me most was the large library in nearly all European languages, and the collection of fine paintings..." Baranoff remarked dryly that a more practical present from the directors would have been one physician.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY — Two Americans played important parts in the early life of Sitka. The first was trader O'Cain, who helped work out an answer to one of Baranoff's knottiest problems—how to stop the Americans from trading with the Indians and keeping them armed and therefore dangerous. Baranoff put twenty bidarki with their crews aboard O'Cain's ship, and O'Cain sailed for California to hunt sea otters on shares. Both men were well pleased with the results of the experiment, which thereafter became standard practice.

Now instead of peddling his cargo piecemeal to the unpredictable Indians, an American skipper would sell it to Baranoff in toto, taking his pay in sealskins. Thus both parties to the deal made a comfortable profit at once. Then the American made an additional profit out of the sea otter the Aleut hunters took from under the noses of the outraged Spaniards in California, while Baranoff, who lacked ships to go after the southern sea otter himself, added a share of the catch to the company's profits. Everybody was happy except the Indians, who got no more guns or whisky.

The other noteworthy American, who arrived at Sitka soon after its founding, was a shipbuilder named Lin-



coln. He built ways and launched the brig Sitka in 1807, the 300-ton ship Otkrytie, or Discovery, the following year, and then the schooner Chirikoff, which sailed for California in 1812 to found Fort Ross.

Many another thriving industry grew out of the needs of the colony, and, foreseeing a day when Russian America must be abandoned unless it could support itself without furs, Baranoff encouraged them all to produce beyond the immediate need. The surplus he disposed of in trade.

Cathedral of St. Michael

cut lumber for shipbuilding, for construction and for export; one cargo was sent as far as Chile. There were two flourmills also—one in town and the other at the Redoubt, some ten miles away by water. Grain was brought from California and ground into flour. Then part of the flour was shipped back to feed the men that grew the grain. California hides were tanned and manufactured into boots and other leather goods, and again the surplus went back to the Spaniards. A brass and iron foundry cast ship fittings, tools and household utensils. There is a story, repeated so often that it has come to seem as factual as the Northwest Passage seemed to the Elizabethan sailors, that the Sitka foundry cast many of the bells that

hang in the California missions. Perhaps it is true, but no one has yet found a single bell anywhere with foundry marks indicating that it was cast in Sitka.

Fishing was always a vital industry, for when supply ships were wrecked the people could still eat fish. Eventually, the fishing station that Baranoff established at the Redoubt—where he sent chronic drunks to sober up—packed hundreds of barrels of red salmon each year for sale to visiting ships, whose masters were always glad to buy not only the fish but fresh produce from the kitchen gardens that dotted the town.

It was no fault of Baranoff's that the mineral resources of the territory were not developed sooner. He had tried to smelt the native iron ore to make ship fittings, but failed for lack of the necessary facilities. Knowing that there were extraordinary deposits of free copper in the Copper River country, he sent out

In these agnostic days a fifty-cent admission ...



a prospecting party. It failed to find the mother lode, as did all other searchers for a hundred years.

Long after the first Chief Manager's death, a mining engineer came from Russia to discover officially what Baranoff had known all the time—that Russian America was rich in minerals. Paradoxically, the Russians' knowledge of the mineral resources of the country, particularly gold, was a weighty factor in their ultimate decision to sell out for what they could get. Unable to develop those resources themselves, they dared not wait for gold-crazed foreigners to invade Russian territory. Even without her remote American possessions, Russia had more land than she could adequately manage or defend.

Sitka's infant industries were vital to Sitka, but they got no encouragement from the far-away directors. The directors wanted furs and more furs, and what

... from the perspective of Mt. Verstovia ... one community.

Photo Shop S



the colonists ate or wore or lived in gave them little concern. Baranoff never failed them. Neither he nor the Russians under him nor the Aleut hunters ever forgot for a moment that their lives were dedicated to fur. From the farthest Aleutian Islands clear down to Lower California, a distance of six thousand miles, the bidarka fleets combed the waters of the Pacific. Sea otters died by the thousand; Aleuts died by the hundred; Russians died by the score, but the company got its furs.

DEATH OF BARANOFF— Protesting that he was old and tired, "with a temper soured by adversity," Baranoff had been asking for twenty years that a younger man be sent to take his place. Two men had been sent, but one died at sea and the other went down with the Neva at the entrance to Sitka Sound. When he was finally relieved, in 1818, Baranoff had been twenty-eight years in the colony; he was past seventy, sick of body and sick at heart. Two of his pet plans—maintaining a post in the Hawaiian Islands and establishing a regular trade with the Philippines, had failed. Worse than that, the directors let him end his long term of arduous service feeling that they distrusted him.

Now, at last, he could return to Russia. But for what? His wife was dead; his properties had dwindled away because of neglect. Would it not be better to spend his last days in a cabin at the Redoubt, close to his beloved Sitka?

But a naval officer who wanted to get rid of him persuaded Baranoff that his advice would be of great value to the directors. So, in the fall, after tearful farewells to every man, woman and child of his flock, he sailed from Sitka in the Kutusoff. It was a slow passage, and a month's delay at fever-ridden Batavia was more than the spent old man could stand. Soon after the ship left Batavia he died and was buried in the Indian Ocean.



... care and comfort for Alaska's old timers ...

THE GREAT DAYS — The history of Sitka, so far, had been the dramatic closing chapter in the life of one man. But Baranoff's work was done, and the naval officers who had hated him took control. Now there dawned for Sitka a new era. The coming of Russian women, the wives and daughters of the officers, lent new tone to the social life. The Chief Manager became His Excellency, the Governor. Down came the modest residence on the big rock, and up in its place went a mansion which became known, incongruously, as Baranoff's Castle. Here the noble governors and their gracious ladies gave balls whose fame spread round the world. Awed by the splendor, Yankee skippers called Sitka the Paris of the Pacific.

Monterey was sunk in lethargy. Santa Barbara was nothing but a mission, and San Francisco, destined soon to explode into a raucous mining town, was still a mud-hut mission village. Nowhere on the whole Pacific coast of North America, save at Sitka, could a voyager find cultured people who understood and

practiced the fine art of living. Shipmasters sometimes complained, however, as they had in Baranoff's day, that Sitka was no place for a moderate drinker. Only a man of prodigious capacity for liquor could hope to stay on his feet through a day of Russian hospitality.

For the town's industries, too, these were great days, although every one of them except the later-day cutting of ice for San Francisco had been begun or projected by the grumpy Little Father. And that project failed for lack of ice, as Baranoff could have told them it would. But ship after ship slid down the ways. Before 1840 the steam tug Muir was launched, the first steam vessel built on the west coast. Her eight horsepower engine and boiler, as well as her hull, were built in Sitka. The sixty horsepower Nicoli I was built shortly after, but her machinery was brought from Boston. The last and most famous Sitka-built vessel was the gunboat Politkofski, launched in 1863. Her flag was changed four years later, when the Castle flag was changed, and for many years thereafter she served as a mill tug on Puget Sound, ending her career after the turn of the century as a landing barge at St. Michael, in the Bering Sea.

But the great days, for all their busyness and glamor, were not cloudless days. The titled governors who followed Baranoff were neither business men nor able administrators. Lacking both the energy that drove Baranoff and the vision that led him, they made little effort to consolidate his gains. Failing to see, as he had seen, that the colony must develop new industries to survive, they drifted toward oblivion along with the sea otter. Hudson's Bay men established posts within the boundaries of Russian America, and the governors had not the strength to oust them. In the face of that insult the leasing of a portion of the southeastern coast to the Hudson's Bay Company was a confession



... halibut schooners call for ice and bait.

of impotence.

Quite apart from the growing weakness of the colony itself, however, the complex world political situation was becoming tense, with Russian America as one of the points of stress. France and Spain had dropped out of the contest, but Britain wanted it and so did the United States. Britain might take it by force. Though Russia and the United States were on very friendly terms the situation was highly explosive. The citizens of Washington Territory were clamoring for rights to the northwest fishing grounds. The smell of gold was in the air. If Britain decided to use force, would the United States help Russia, help Britain, or just help herself?

Most of this was over the heads of the people of Sitka, but shortly before 1860 they knew that American and Russian diplomats were discussing terms of sale. The American Civil War gave them a breathing spell, but when it was over negotiations were resumed. The day came when they learned that Sitka and all of Russian America had been sold to the United States.

THE TRANSFER — Into Sitka harbor, on the 18th of October, 1867, steamed the U. S. gunboat Ossipee, bringing the official party for the ceremony of transfer. The side-wheeler John L. Stephens had arrived some days earlier with two companies of troops. Two other American vessels were in port, the sloop-of-war Jamestown and the gunboat Resaca. They were not there to take part in the transfer, however, but to cure their crews of yellow fever acquired in the tropics.

About 3:30 o'clock in the afternoon of October 18th, two hundred American troops were drawn up facing a hundred Russian troops and the ceremony of transfer was performed. To the booming of salutes from the Ossipee and answering roars from the shore batteries, the Russian flag came down and the American flag went up. Russian America had become Alaska.

Three generations of Sitka-born Russians had never seen Russia. Should they go to the fatherland that was a foreign land to them, or stay and become citizens of a strange nation? It was a difficult choice, but in the end most of them left. Of those that stayed, several families are represented in the Sitka of today.

THE BLACK DAYS — Scarcely were the Stars and Stripes hoisted over Sitka when there poured into town a motley crowd of gamblers, schemers and adventurers. Along Lincoln Street they threw up frame shacks, in ugly contrast to the old hewn-log buildings, and waited for the boom that never came. The boomers moved on in time, and the heart-beat of the town almost stopped.

The schools were closed, the shipyard silent, the tannery, foundry, machine shop and mills abandoned. Unobtrusively the bidarka men had paddled away toward their homes in the westward islands. In the once

thriving, civilized town there were left only a few bewildered Russian families, a few American traders, swarms of openly resentful Indians—and the troops.

In Washington the ignorance of the new territory and its needs was black and impenetrable, but the worst of many blunders was the quartering of troops at Sitka. Bound by water to one of a thousand islands and confined by dense forest and rugged mountains to a small spot on that island, the troops were useless. A malefactor was safe from capture the moment he stepped into a canoe. While the scattered outposts took care of themselves as best they could, the troops dismally failed to keep order even in Sitka, and they were a constant irritation to natives and civilian whites alike. It took Washington ten years to grasp the simple truth that two or three gunboats could maintain order in Alaska where an army could not.

Meanwhile the people tried time and again to organize a civil government, only to fail each time for lack of laws to back them up. Murderers might go unpunished, for their act violated no law.

In 1877 the troops were withdrawn, but Sitka's rejoicing at their departure was brief, for the promised revenue cutters did not come, except for short and infrequent calls. The sole representatives of government were a Collector of Customs and his deputy. In the Indian village adjoining the town there was dangerous talk. "We let the Russians use the island, but they no longer wanted it," the chiefs reasoned. "Now the Americans do not want it either, for they no longer protect it, so let us take it back. It has always belonged to us anyway."

Learning that trouble was brewing, the whites asked once again that a cutter be stationed permanently at Sitka, according to the original plan. None came. When a friendly Indian woman whispered that her people were about to attack, the white families barricaded

themselves in the larger log buildings. In desperation they sent a plea for help to Victoria, and the British, creating a bond of friendship that should never be forgotten, responded at once. It was the British gunboat Osprey, steaming into the harbor with its guns trained on the native village, that saved Sitka. Not a drop of blood had been spilled, but the besieged people had lived in such terror that the incident is still called "the massacre."

RECOVERY— In 1879 the navy was given jurisdiction over Alaska. Gunboats patrolled the waters, and two companies of marines were stationed at Sitka. The marines proved an asset to the town's social life, and when they were withdrawn in 1912 many left the service to become civilian Sitkans.

By the time the Americans bought Alaska the sea

... cut Sitka spruce and hemlock.





a troller near Cape Edgecumbe ...

otter was almost extinct in the waters around Sitka. Not until the sealing industry was developed in the 'Eighties did the town have an industry. Then for a dozen years nearly a hundred sealing schooners operating in the North Pacific called frequently at Sitka; several small vessels operated out of Sitka, and the Sitka natives took many seals with their open boats.

About the time that the town felt the surge of its new prosperity, the political situation greatly improved. A civil government for Alaska was established in 1884 and as the capital of the District of Alaska, Sitka recovered something of her old air of timelessness and quiet self-assurance. Perhaps she became complacent also, for the new mining town of Juneau took the capital away from her. By then Sitka had enough stability so that the gradual removal of the capital, beginning in 1904, caused no collapse. Many good citizens consoled themselves with the thought that part-

ing with territorial politics was by no means an unmitigated loss. The governmental payroll was much smaller then than now and its loss was more than compensated by the coming of the salmon and halibut fisheries. These brought a fishing fleet, a cannery and a cold storage plant—the main ingredients, with the sawmill, of the prosperity that Sitka enjoys to the present day.

THE SITKA OF TODAY — On the surface at least, Sitka today is a progressive community, full of push and progress. Rotarians and Lions and a Chamber of Commerce strive earnestly to make it a better place to live. An endless stream of government advisers and prodders and do-gooders has taught the people to talk glibly, in terms of millions of dollars, of vast new enterprises—of power developments; of pulp mills

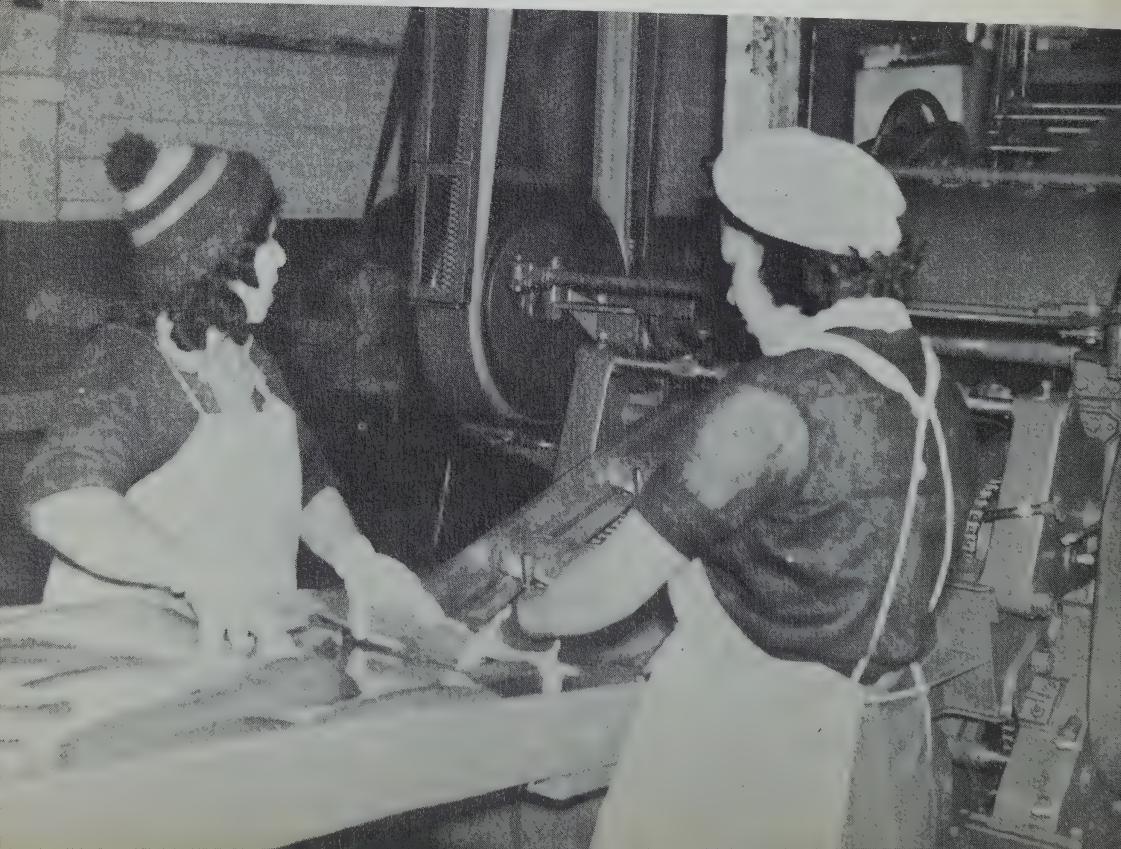
... gaffs a King salmon.



employing thousands of people; of housing projects extending from here to there. To a reasonable extent the service organizations accomplish their purpose, but the comings and goings of the planners seem to take place in a dream sequence; and, dreamlike, their vast projects rise and vanish.

Perhaps it is just as well that Sitka should remain basically unchanged, for scratch a Sitkan and you will find a person that, knowingly or not, has chosen Sitka for his home because it is a philosophy and a way of life as well as a place to live. Your true Sitkan is secondarily a fisherman or a teacher, an odd job man or a merchant; primarily he is a practitioner of the art of living. He has attuned himself to a rhythm of life that makes all others seem frantic. He has shed pretensions as a wet dog sheds water. He expects his peculiarities to be tolerated, so he is likely to be tolerant of his neighbors. The mountains that almost

... in a good year sixty thousand cases of salmon.



complete the compass circle around the town have become a part of him, and he greets them each day like old friends — the Sisters, the Pyramids, Verstovia, Edgecumbe. The sea at his doorstep makes him feel close to the ageless cycles of moon and tide.

Now and then new converts to the Sitka way of life grow restless, shake its raindrops from their slickers, and go to grasp at the larger opportunities of the great Outside. In a few weeks or months they are usually back again, wide eyed with wonder that people should choose to live in cities.

MOUNT EDGECUMBE— One exception to the wraith-like quality of the government's projects for Sitka has been the coming of the Alaska Native Service, but this event was less a matter of planning than of accident.

As it did to the rest of the world, World War II brought drastic changes to Sitka. In the nervous pre-Pearl Harbor days the navy began the construction of an air base on Japonski Island in Sitka Harbor. The army moved in to protect the base. Through the war years the thousands of service men came to seem like a permanent part of the town, though the history-minded recalled that the military had often come before, and as often departed, leaving behind those who chose to stay on as civilians. The factor that was new this time was the acres of steel and concrete buildings that the navy had built and abandoned. If some use could be found for the vast plant then the awful waste of war would be reduced by that much.

After due pondering, the Great White Father decreed that the Sitka Naval Air Station should be turned over to the Alaska Native Service of the Department of the Interior. Thus the sword was hammered into a plow-share and the Mount Edgecumbe School came into being, together with the Orthopedic Hospital of the Alaska Department of Health and, later, the A.N.S. Tuberculosis Sanatorium.

To the Mount Edgecumbe School come some six hundred native students from towns and villages scattered from Ketchikan to Kotzebue. They receive academic and trade instruction from the seventh grade through high school. At the Orthopedic Hospital Alaska's crippled children, both white and native, receive the best care that medical science and a devoted staff can give them. The Tuberculosis Sanatorium is for natives only.

Geographically and politically, Mt. Edgecumbe is not a part of Sitka, but in many other ways the two form one community, to their mutual advantage.

FOR THE TOURIST— What has Sitka to offer the visitor? Very little, or a great deal, depending on the visitor himself. Not everyone can see or appreciate the essential personality of the town, and not everyone finds interest in historical landmarks. But while idly seeking the former, the visitor may as well stroll about and see some of the latter.

Looming conspicuously above the waterfront is the rocky Castle Hill, where Baranoff landed his cannon in 1804. The Baranoff Castle was destroyed by fire in 1894 and replaced by an Agricultural Department building, now the property of the town. About the foot of the hill, where commercial buildings and the Federal Building stand, the Russian barracks once stood, as well as a bathhouse, tannery, trading post and offices.

The Alaska Pioneers' Home was built on the site of the old American barracks, and its lawn was once the Parade Ground. In the center of the lawn is a bronze statue, The Prospector, in memory of the early pioneers of Alaska. Where the totem pole now stands, in front of the Home, Lincoln long ago built ships for Baranoff.

On a low hill near the Pioneers' Home is the grave of Princess Maksoutoff, wife of the last Russian gov-

ernor. The princess who lies here was an English-woman, so her grave is in the Lutheran cemetery, not the Russian. On either side of the Lutheran cemetery a Russian blockhouse watched over the town. A third, at the outlet of Swan Lake, has fallen in ruins like the others, but a replica of one of them has been built on the beach in the Sitka National Monument. Among the trees in the Monument, better known as the Park, is a collection of totem poles.

Near the public school is the Russian Mission, or orphanage, the old log building where Sitkans once barricaded themselves against an expected attack from the Indians. Where Lincoln Street crosses a stream a sawmill marks the location of the sawmill and flourmill that Baranoff built.

Much the finest item of Sitka's legacy from history is the log-built Orthodox Cathedral of St. Michael. Even today it seems to give a center to the town, and in the old days it was the very heart of the community.

... mild cure salmon for the New York market.



Religious holidays dotted the Russian calendar, and the impressive rituals, deeply satisfying to a hard-working, emotional people, were important social events.

For the visitor who wants the meat of modern industry rather than the dry bones of history, the waterfront is the place to start, and finish. Some six hundred trolling boats operate out of Sitka, and some part of this fleet can be seen at any time, selling fish, waiting in line at the ice chute, or lying at the floats. A typical troller is manned by a crew of two. The owner-skipper is a fiercely independent person who is navigator, seaman, businessman, laborer and gambler, all rolled into one. When he tells you that he is a Fisherman, he capitalizes the word. The second member of the crew is a helper who works on shares, or it may be the skipper's wife.

During a season the trolling fleet brings in some two million pounds of Kings and Cohoes—the only salmon that will strike at bait. Roughly half the total is frozen for the fresh fish market. The other half is mild cured and eventually appears in the eastern markets as smoked salmon.

Other species of salmon are caught by a handful of seine boats and are canned—somewhere around forty thousand cases a season. Sitka's small seining fleet is largely owned and manned by Indians, or, as they prefer to be called, natives. Even among fishermen a seiner is a gambler at long odds. Conservation measures have shortened the season to a few weeks, and in those few weeks the fish may run for only a few days. Thus a season's earnings may have to be made in a matter of days, if at all.

However, the age of highly specialized fishing is fading, and new boats are usually designed to be easily convertible from one type of fishing to another. Thus at different times in the same year a fisherman may

be a halibuter, a troller, a seiner, or have a fling at tuna off the coast of Washington and Oregon.

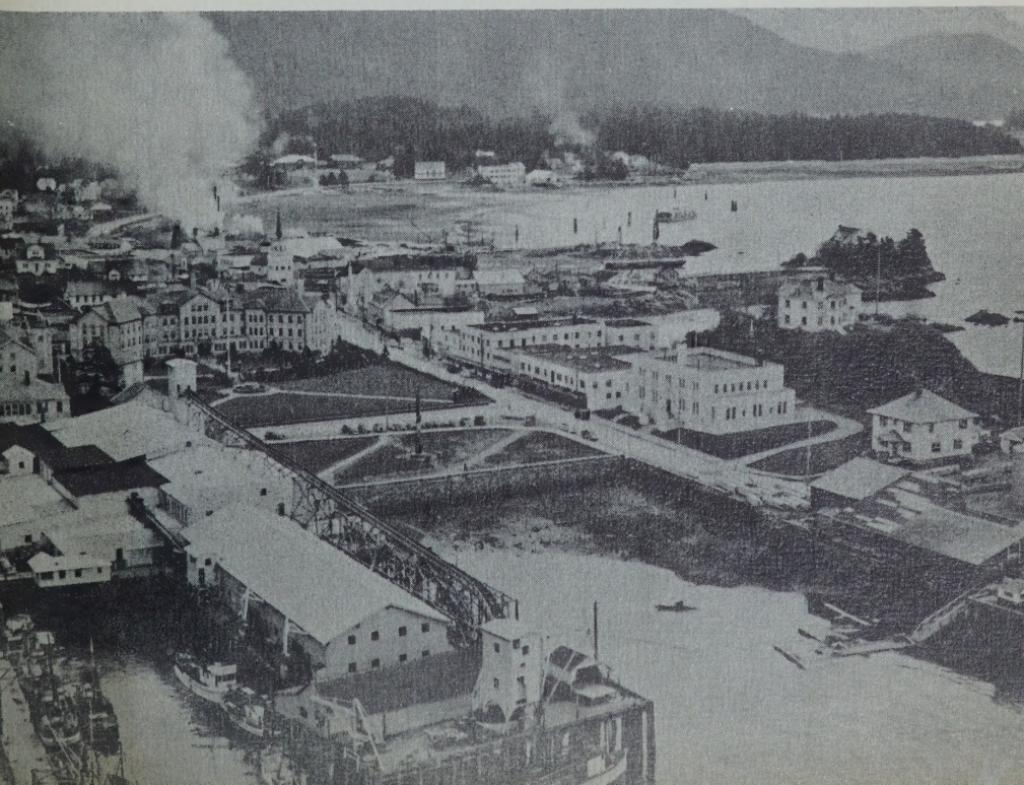
In both poundage and value halibut runs a close second to salmon, and the buyers and the cold storage plant handle several million pounds in a season. All of it is fresh frozen.

Sitka's second industry is lumber, which gives almost year-round work to loggers, millwrights, etc., and which exports up to fifteen million feet of spruce and hemlock in a year.

Of at least passing interest to some visitors is the Coast and Geodetic Survey observatory, a key station in locating and measuring the earth's quivers and quakes, and in recording the constant fluctuations of the earth's magnetic field.

Not far from the observatory is the National Cemetery, the only one west of the Mississippi until a second was established at San Francisco's Presidio after World War II.

... a progressive community ... basically unchanged.



Sturdy hikers with a little more time on their hands will find several trails to try their mettle—Indian River, Gavan Hill, Verstovia, Mt. Edgecumbe. Less ambitious mountaineers can hire a jeep and drive to the top of Harbor Mountain, or charter a plane and get a really comfortable look at the country.

Or would you rather go fishing? In the salt chuck red snappers and bottom fish are easily caught if the more sporting salmon seems too elusive. Trout fishermen can have their choice of lake or stream within a few minutes of town.

But whether you see everything and do everything or drift into contented lassitude does not really matter. Sitka has been here for a long time and expects to be here a great deal longer. What you fail to do on this visit you can do on your next, for if you have been to Sitka the chances are better than you might suppose that you will come again. Someday something, perhaps nothing more than the swoop of a gull, the clang of a bell, or the salty smell of a sea breeze blowing across a beach at low tide, will fill you with an overwhelming nostalgia, and you will come back to Sitka.

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